

A Navy man takes on "the Company."

## Admirable Stansfield Turner

Gorge a Pentagon computer with Naval personnel files. Ask it to disgorge a highly intelligent, modern and politic flag officer, with a proper taste of staff experience as well as combat sea commands. You probably will get Stansfield Turner.

Now feed the whirring tapes and pockmarked cards that house the 30-year history of the Central Intelligence Agency (slightly expurgated, of course, even in the top-secret internal government version) from the old-boy OSS alumni who toppled Mossadegh to the payoffs for King Hussein and assorted other sharecroppers of our foreign policy. Add the Turner file. Ask for "command and control." But at this point, intrepid programmer, you should stand back. The computer, still not knowing all the necessary data, may be confused at the question. And confused machines can be dangerous.

At 53, Turner has those avuncular good looks of Navy recruitment brochures—the full, mature face on the bridge that is the destiny of conscientious midshipmen and a reassurance to taxpayers. He is an advertisement for his profession, or at least for how the Navy prefers to see itself. After a comfortable start at Amherst he joined Jimmy Carter's wartime class at Annapolis and finished first in it. His academic distinction brought a Rhodes Scholarship at Oxford and the special caste advantages the American military has long conferred on the valedictory men from the academies. Though he served his early duty primarily on destroyers, ever the stepchildren of the fleet, Turner rose steadily in the post-war years. As important as his advance in rank was his technical experience—the most valuable credential of a future admiral—interspersed with posts commanding a guided-missile frigate off Vietnam and a sixth fleet carrier group; as director of the systems analysis division under the Chief of Naval Operations; and as president of the Naval War College at Newport. When Turner took the NATO Mediterranean command in 1975, his 29-year climb to Admiral had about it a gleam of inevitability, with a seat among the Joint Chiefs, perhaps even the chairmanship, the natural climax. But now with the summons to be Carter's Director of Central Intelligence, Stansfield Turner's progress has taken a very different turn. The troubling question—wholly unanswered in his flabby, shambling confirmation hearings—is whether even this impressive making of an admiral will enable him to run "the Company" rather than vice-versa.

The answer lies in part in the man behind the brilliant

record, in part in the institution that shaped him: the United States Navy and its post-World War II angst. Men who have served with Turner speak of him with the predictable mixture of respect and resentment, but the characterizations are almost unfailingly general and amorphous. His has been the usual phantom trail of the gifted and successful bureaucrat. He was there at the side of the Secretary of the Navy in 1969 and 1970 when the Pentagon pressed Nixon to resume the air war as a quick fix in Vietnam. The Navy in particular argued for the blockades of Sihanoukville and Haiphong, a prologue to brutal and wasteful episodes to follow in Cambodia and to the bombing of North Vietnam. Turner was there too as head of systems analysis in 1971 and 1972 when the Navy was fighting some of its least glorious engagements over a bloated budget for nuclear carriers and taking part in a monumental bureaucratic squabble in which the SALT negotiations were held hostage to new submarine development.

Yet there is little of Stansfield Turner in this history except his physical presence, and of course his unbroken promotion. Through a series of sensitive and relatively conspicuous jobs, he has taken no notable position on the great issues that occupied his Navy: the future of the surface fleet; the utility of the carrier; the reliance on the strategic nuclear submarine; the intelligence disputes over Soviet shipbuilding; the eager, bloody race with the Air Force to display tactical air virtuosity in the Vietnam war. Still, it is possible to find some kind thoughts for a man like Turner writing the safe memoranda, mouthing the orthodox speeches, and sailing with the tides. In its provincialism and comparative poverty of talent at flag grade, the Navy has been, and remains, the most benighted of the armed services—the last to recognize the 20th century in matters ranging from racial integration in the ranks to grand strategy at sea. That Turner chose by intellect, taste, or—more likely—self-interest to stand apart from the Navy's retrograde policies may well be a virtue. The cost of the disdain, if that is what it was, was as always that the abuses of the system survived all the longer.

There also is authentic pathos in what has happened to the Navy in the last three decades, affecting the careers of the Stansfield Turners. The Annapolis class of 1946 hurried into a universe in which the nuclear stand-off, third-world nationalism and American domestic politics would conspire to reward the victorious Navy with an inescapable obsolescence. Bred to the wardrooms of an imperial fleet, officers of the Turner generation found the frontiers of empire murky and shrunken. Their wars were the vainglories of Korea and Vietnam, until the tradition they had taken for granted was reduced to an aging collection of men and vessels in search of a mission. Turner and his peers might still strut on the decks of the slightly

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*Stansfield Turner*

antique task forces anchored in Naples or Norfolk, but the reminder always was there in the halls of the Pentagon, where the florid paintings of great naval actions stopped with Okinawa.

It has been a chastening, sometimes shattering transformation for such officers. In many, like Turner, it seems to have left a lasting sense of the restraints of modern foreign policy. In that sense, in fact, Turner may be more educated by reality than the civilians whose shuttle between government and corporate power is so insulated. At any rate the result in Turner is a refreshing air of proportion and an absence of pretense. At the Naval War College he is remembered for dispensing with uniforms and installing the most rigorous academic standards in recent history: both symbolic of a conviction that the Navy, his command in any case, could no longer afford its stylish mediocrity. By several accounts he has grown into the sort of commander the Navy needs—a fine mind schooled in the anachronism of pushing the rest of the world around. This gift will serve him somewhat at the CIA, but only somewhat.

Like the Navy, the CIA is a bureaucracy in search of a mission. Turner will be set atop an organization which always has had a profound sense of its institutional superiority and the necessity of its self-defined role. Not only do the "spooks" from Langley generally outstrip their State Department and Pentagon counterparts in sheer intellect—they also know what a

nasty world it is out there.

Their great battles have been both recent and victorious—most notably the outlasting and outfoxing of the US Congress in 1975 and 1976. "The Company" has weathered the most serious challenge to its position, engineering a denouement that provided a renewed example of legislative impotence and public fickleness. In the Admiral's idiom, it is almost as if the Navy had beaten North Korea and North Vietnam single-handedly, and in the process scared the Russians back into Black Sea coves.

So Turner will preside not over some newly modest, moribund secret service, but rather over a bureaucracy at its worst and most irresponsible: enjoying the flush of vindication. He will encounter from the outset the vast inertia of ongoing investments and clients, governments owned and leased as a matter of routine, "assets" as strongly entrenched and time-honored in the agency's chain of command as any naval tradition.

Except that it will not be his tradition, and perhaps not his chain of command either. The issues that dominate the station cable traffic in the 1970s are precisely those Stansfield Turner knows least about as an accomplished naval officer. They are questions of resource politics, financial manipulations, infiltration of sophisticated legal and corporate networks, elaborate laundering of money and arms for clients in the Middle East or Africa where past operations have been too easily exposed. Think for a moment of the likely pressure points over the next several years, places and people to which Turner will have to bring some independent judgment if he is to avoid becoming captive in the director's sunny office up the Potomac. There is southern Africa with its singular racial history and politics; there is increasing support inside the Carter administration for arming the black guerrillas, while the CIA clings to its liaison with the white states. Or take the Middle East, where the destruction of the PLO in Lebanon has altered the balance of power drastically, while the bureaucratic balance inside the CIA has tipped for the first time in 30 years toward the large pro-Arab faction. Or take Latin America, the agency's largest single collection of foreign bodies, where yet-unreported local violence could bring to power a host of Allendes in the next few years, throwing out of work both the last CIA representatives and their proteges. Or take Japan and Korea. Sordid CIA liaisons with both governments may determine the pace of troop withdrawals from Korea,

economic relations with Japan, and ultimately the solution of the Taiwan tangle. The Shah of Iran has his imperial ambitions as great as his oil and the affections of the local CIA station. The curriculum is as tough as any Turner has mastered, from Annapolis to the War College, and he will find that this time no one will be particularly interested in helping him get good grades.

No one, that is, except perhaps the man who hired him. Jimmy Carter is going to be the difference between Turner's performing valuable public service at the CIA, or merely acting as a vapid caretaker. If the Admiral is truly to command the Company, he will need the unstinting support of the White House, public and political support as well as private bureaucratic backing. Only Carter can take on the congressional and journalistic wolves unleashed when reform even gets into the parking lot at Langley. Only Carter can stiffen, cajole, confront, and, if necessary, unseat the mostly meek, ignorant men on the congressional oversight committees. And the President could have an ally in Walter Mondale, whose service on the Church Committee gave him a searing taste of both the agency's skills and the general cowardice and bewilderment of the Congress.

Without extraordinary help from Carter, Turner's chances are long at best. Bright, sophisticated, polished, apparently at ease with himself and his country's limited place on the planet, he is no Curtis LeMay railing against the sun. But he is not Billy Mitchell either. He too comes from a world long-shaped by its own rationale, by a self-defined ethic and vision. For his many strengths, he remains very much a man of the system, and it is a dogged, dangerous system he must change.

**Suetonius**

### A Word About "Suetonius"

Several readers have written objecting to the use of a pseudonym by the author of our recent series of profiles of members of the new administration. Our intention is to imitate (frankly) the tradition of tough, unsigned profiles in British journals such as *The New Statesman*. "Suetonius," in other words, is a new department, like TRB and the lead editorial. It is not intended as a vehicle for "anonymous hatchet jobs."

The author of the articles we have published so far, including the profile of Stansfield Turner in this issue, is Roger Morris, a *TNR* contributing editor who has worked at the National Security Council and the State Department and is the author of *Uncertain Greatness: Henry Kissinger & American Foreign Policy*, to be published by Harper and Row, and other studies of US foreign policy.